

A MICROGRANT SUPPORTED POPPY CULTIVATION RENOUNCEMENT PROGRAM FOR AFGHANISTAN

BY

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USAWC CLASS OF 2009

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U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA 17013-5050

Report Documentation Page			Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188		
Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.					
1. REPORT DATE 30 MAR 2009		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE A Microgrant Supported Poppy Cultivation Renouncement Program for Afghanistan				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S) Ashton Hayes				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army War College ,122 Forbes Ave.,Carlisle,PA,17013-5220				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited.					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT see attached					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 28	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified			

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1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 17-02-2009		2. REPORT TYPE Strategy Research Project		3. DATES COVERED (From - To)	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE A Microgrant Supported Poppy Cultivation Renouncement Program for Afghanistan				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S) Colonel Ashton Hayes				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Colonel Robert Nye Department of Command, Leadership, and Management (DCLM)				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army War College 122 Forbes Avenue Carlisle, PA 17013				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Distribution A: Unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT In 2007, Afghan grown poppies provided the raw material used to produce 93% of the world's opium. The Taliban and other insurgent elements receive up to \$500 million of revenue from drug related activities. The current counternarcotics strategy emphasizes the execution of eradication programs coupled with initiatives designed to help farmers develop alternative livelihoods. Unfortunately, the current strategy does not provide any time after eradication effects for farmers to allow alternative livelihood initiatives to develop nor does the strategy address any schemes to deter key traffickers from disrupting counternarcotics efforts. This paper addresses the time problem of the current eradication/alternative livelihood counternarcotics strategy and proposes the creation of a microgrant supported poppy cultivation renouncement program. Finally, the paper suggests that as long as appropriate accountability measures exist, the hiring of key traffickers to help administer and monitor the program will turn a disruptive element into a potential influence of support for Afghan government and coalition efforts.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS Counternarcotics, Eradication, Alternative Livelihood					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT UNLIMITED	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 28	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT UNCLASSIFIED	b. ABSTRACT UNCLASSIFIED	c. THIS PAGE UNCLASSIFIED			19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (include area code)

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**A MICROGRANT SUPPORTED POPPY CULTIVATION
RENOUNCEMENT PROGRAM FOR AFGHANISTAN**

by

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ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: Colonel Ashton Hayes

TITLE: A Microgrant Supported Poppy Cultivation Renouncement Program for Afghanistan

FORMAT: Strategy Research Project

DATE: 17 February 2009 WORD COUNT: 5602 PAGES: 28

KEY TERMS: Counternarcotics, Eradication, Alternative Livelihood

CLASSIFICATION: Unclassified

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A MICROGRANT SUPPORTED POPPY CULTIVATION RENOUNCEMENT PROGRAM FOR AFGHANISTAN

Since removing the Taliban from power in 2001, the United States has struggled to establish and maintain conditions leading to a stable Afghanistan with a functioning government. In September 2008, instability and turbulence reached a point that Admiral Michael Mullen, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, announced, "I intend to commission, and ... am looking at a new, more comprehensive strategy for the region."¹

The development of a new Afghanistan strategy offers an opportunity to reassess, update, and modify the current counternarcotics strategy to rein in the ever present and pervasive poppy and opium problem. In 2007, poppy cultivation occurred on a record 477,000 acres of Afghan land.² Opium produced from the poppies resulted in an export value of \$4 billion dollars and accounted for 53% of the Afghanistan Gross Domestic Product.³ To put the opium issue in a world context, in 2007, Afghan poppies provided the raw material for 93% of the world's opium.⁴ Just as troublesome is the unfortunate reality that the Taliban and other insurgent elements receive a large amount of funding from the Afghan drug trade. Antonio Maria Costas, the head of the United Nation's Office on Drugs and Crime, recently estimated that in 2008, insurgent elements might receive close to \$500 million of revenue from drug related activities.⁵ A poppy cultivation renouncement program using monetary microgrants to incentivize farmers to abandon the poppy business and buying the support of key traffickers by enlisting their assistance in running the program will reduce the amount of opium produced.

History of Afghanistan Opium Production

Poppy and opium have long played a role in Afghanistan's economy, but only in the last 20 years has production increased to levels that today affect the entire world. In 1978 prior to the pro-Communist coup, Afghanistan produced 330 tons of opium, which was just enough to satisfy local demand and support a few opium production facilities.⁶ In the 1980s, poppy cultivation began to rise resulting in a production of over 4900 tons in 1999⁷ and nearly 4000 tons in 2000.⁸ Also by 2000, Afghanistan was a significant player in the global opium market, accounting for nearly 75% of the world's supply.⁹

Poppy cultivation experienced a significant reduction in 2001 after Mullah Mohammad Omar, the Taliban's supreme leader, banned all poppy planting prior to the November 2000 planting season.¹⁰ A religious edict making poppy growing contrary to the tenets of Islam augmented the ban.¹¹ Farmers who did not adhere to the ban often received jail sentences or worse to include execution and the Taliban burned any discovered opium laboratories.¹² The harsh enforcement measures resulted in a 2001 poppy harvest of 185 tons, a truly dramatic reduction from previous years.¹³

The reduction did not last. When the Taliban banned poppy cultivation, they did not ban the opiate trade. Many experts believe the intent of the ban was to increase the opium market price in order to increase revenue from stockpiled opium supplies.¹⁴ Therefore, once Taliban leaders fled Afghanistan, conditions were still in place for poppy growing to resume because all the tools of the drug trade remained intact. Poppy growing again increased resulting in a 2002 production of over 3,000 tons of opium.¹⁵

In the years following the removal of the Taliban from power, both the international community and Afghan government tried to rein in poppy cultivation. In 2002, Hamid Karzai, the new president of Afghanistan, officially prohibited the growing

of opium poppy and declared a jihad against the drug industry.¹⁶ However, President Karzai's edict did not have credible enforcement backing and became empty rhetoric.

On the international side, the United Kingdom and the United States have been the two main state actors working to reduce opium production. The 2001 Bonn Conference designated the United Kingdom as the lead nation for international counternarcotics assistance and policy in Afghanistan.¹⁷ In 2004, the United Kingdom pledged over \$100 million dollars to counternarcotics efforts¹⁸ and helped the Afghan government develop a program focused on eradication efforts.

In 2005, the United States joined the counternarcotics effort with an earmark of \$150 million for eradication efforts. Unfortunately, only 600 acres received eradication effects in the first year.¹⁹ Those 600 destroyed acres were less than 1% of the land used for poppy cultivation.²⁰ The results from 2006 eradication efforts were even more dismal as total poppy production increased 59% from 2005 to over 400,000 acres.²¹

Current Counternarcotics Strategy

The year 2006 saw the release and implementation of the current Afghan National Drug Control Strategy.²² The strategy establishes eight pillars for eliminating the drug trade. The current eight pillars include: (1) a year round public information campaign to help the government of Afghanistan achieve sustainable reduction in poppy cultivation, (2) alternative development initiatives to establish economic alternatives to poppy cultivation, (3) elimination and eradication initiatives to deter and reduce poppy cultivation, (4) interdiction programs to decrease narcotics trafficking and processing, (5) law enforcement and justice reforms to improve narcotics-related police and justice sector efforts, (6) demand reduction initiatives to prevent and reduce

Afghanistan's domestic drug abuse problem, (7) institution building programs to build up key ministries and other institutions involved in the fight against drugs, and (8) international and regional cooperation efforts to build counternarcotics support from Afghanistan's international neighbors.²³ Although all eight pillars receive attention, the strategy primarily focuses on the two pillars of eradication and alternative livelihood development.²⁴

Current Counternarcotics Situation

The current Afghanistan counternarcotics strategy has seen some success. In 2008 the number of acres used for poppy cultivation decreased to 388,000 acres.²⁵ Additionally, the number of poppy free provinces increased 38% from 13 to 18.²⁶ Therefore, out of 34 provinces 16 produced poppy. Out of the 16 poppy producing provinces, just seven specific provinces in the southwest (Helmand, Kandahar, Uruzgan, Farah, Nimruz, Day-Kundi, and Zabul) are responsible for 98% of Afghanistan's opium.²⁷ Helmand province alone produces two-thirds of Afghanistan's poppy.²⁸

Two primary factors account for the declining poppy harvests. One factor is strong leadership from some governors that discouraged poppy growing through anti-cultivation campaigns, peer pressure, and the promotion of rural development. The second factor is a significant drought in the north and north-west.²⁹

One important note regarding the decreased poppy production is that eradication efforts did not play a major effort in the production drop of 2007. In fact, there is evidence indicating that a strategy focused on eradication efforts does not reduce the size of a narcotics economy.³⁰

Key Players in Drug Trade

Farmers and traffickers form the two main groups involved in the Afghan drug trade. The two groups have their own particular methods and motives explaining their involvement with opium. Understanding why each group continues to participate in the opium market is critical when evaluating the effectiveness of any potential change to the counternarcotics strategy.

For many farmers, poppy cultivation is the only viable means to reach goals of obtaining land, water, agriculture supplies, and credit.³¹ Many farms experienced significant crop failure from 1998-2001 due to a nationwide drought.³² In order to subsist, farmers had to borrow money. As large debt accumulated, farmers entered into repayment programs requiring continued poppy harvests to pay off the debt. Ironically, poppy eradication policies led to increased poppy growing. Once eradication occurred the farmers lost income potential, which meant more borrowing, more debt, and more poppy later.³³ A counternarcotics strategy has the potential for success if the strategy helps the farmers break out of the current continuous debt/payment cycle.

The traffickers who ship and distribute the refined opium products make up the second group of key players in the Afghan drug business. A successful counternarcotics strategy must account for disruption activities undertaken by traffickers to ensure a continued drug flow. Any change to the current counternarcotics strategy requires addressing the anticipated “pushback” from the traffickers as poppy production diminishes.

Poppy Cultivation Renouncement Program

Even though the 2008 counternarcotics effort in Afghanistan saw success in reducing the total amount of poppy grown, there is no indication that the current strategy will lead to future success. Since drought conditions contributed significantly to the reductions of 2008, there is no confidence that poppy cultivation reduction would continue if future years saw more rain. Now is the time to add a new element to the counternarcotics strategy to address a key fault in the current counternarcotics strategy.

The main effort of the current Afghan Drug Control Strategy attempts to simultaneously perform robust eradication programs and implement development assistance initiatives.³⁴ Administering simultaneous development assistance initiatives and eradication programs means farmers have no opportunity to build new livelihoods before losing the income previously earned from poppy cultivation.

Eradication efforts by their very nature are cold and antiseptic. In 2007, President Karzai denied a United States government request to allow aerial spraying eradication operations.³⁵ To destroy poppy crops requires Afghan government or coalition forces to enter a farm, inform the occupants that illegal poppy is growing and then the forces manually destroy any poppy crops on the land. Farmers then have no options in regards to earning a living because the government does not provide compensation for the eradication since poppy growing is illegal.

Alternative livelihood efforts attempt to counter eradication efforts by offering farmers options other than growing poppy. These alternative livelihood initiatives have to take into account that Afghanistan is one of the poorest countries in the world.³⁶ The ability to find and develop natural resource opportunities is limited and manufacturing is virtually non-existent. The lack of developed industry means most alternative livelihood

efforts must focus on encouraging farmers to grow crops different from opium. Through the implementation of advanced farming techniques, farmers can abandon the poppy business because other crops provide a suitable livelihood. The problem, of course, is farmers cannot immediately make enough money from growing wheat, saffron, or traditional farm crops to replace the income made from growing poppy. Farming education and attempts at growing potentially profitable non-poppy crops takes time and farmers have no ability to earn money in the interim.

To counter the fault line created with the simultaneous implementation of eradication operations and alternative livelihood development requires the development of a time buffer in the counternarcotics strategy. Without income to replace money made from poppy, no incentive exists to discontinue growing the poppy. The same rationale holds true for the traffickers.

A program with the potential for reducing the amount of poppy produced will use livelihood-replacing microgrants to replace poppy income to entice farmers to renounce poppy cultivation and pursue long-term alternative livelihood opportunities. Additionally, the program will seek to hire key traffickers to help administer and manage the program. The income made from managing the program will help to defray income lost from opium production and distribution. The renouncement program identified as the Poppy Cultivation Renouncement Program (PCPR) will create the needed time buffer between eradication and alternative livelihood efforts. The PCRP uses as a model the “Sons of Iraq” programs in which U.S. forces paid former insurgents to stop attacking coalition forces and instead take up arms against Al Qaeda extremists. The “Sons of Iraq” programs led to lower levels of violence in some of the most volatile Iraqi provinces.³⁷

The PCRCP creates a time buffer providing farmers with the chance for development initiatives to take hold and flourish. The program will first focus on targeting poppy farmers to renounce poppy cultivation. Renouncement incentive will come in the form of microgrants designed to replace income lost from poppy cultivation so the farmers can remain above the debt spiral. The farmers can then pursue alternative livelihood opportunities without the pressure from accumulating debt. In order to receive the microgrants, the farmers must formally renounce further poppy cultivation. If the farmers do not accept the provisions of the program, then their crops are subject to the eradication efforts of the Afghan Drug Control Strategy.

The PCRCP will also target the key non-farming drug players with certain inducements to include monetary payments in order to prevent program disruption. If these non-farming drug players do not receive some type of appeasement to replace money lost from the drug business, the program has a very limited chance of success.

Program Description

To fully support the current counternarcotics strategy requires the PCRCP to incorporate the following six key elements for success: (1) a targeted and phased approach to the program, (2) a need for the government of Afghan to administer the program, (3) a requirement for beneficiaries to renounce poppy cultivation and accept program compliance verification, (4) obtaining support from key traffickers, (5) strong enforcement of violations, and (6) a limited duration of seven years with no recipient receiving benefits for more than five years.

The first key program element is to prudently target farmers and to phase in the program over several years. As stated earlier, seven provinces in Afghanistan produce

the vast majority of Afghan poppy. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in its 2008 Afghanistan Opium Survey recommended that counternarcotics efforts focus on the provinces of Farah and Nimruz where poppy cultivation and insurgent activity is lower than in southern provinces like Helmand.³⁸

Therefore, the program for the first year will only focus on Farah, Nimruz, and the next three smallest poppy producing provinces (Uruzgan, Zabul, and Day Kundi). These five provinces only account for 25% of the poppy grown in Afghanistan and are less violent than Kandahar and Helmand.³⁹ Initially omitting the provinces of Kandahar and Helmand will allow the program to develop before tackling the more violent and challenging two remaining poppy producing provinces. Phasing the implementation of the program will result in lower initial costs since the targeting of potential beneficiaries occurs over three years. An added bonus is if the first year is successful then donor nations will more likely support the effort in future years. The program will extend to Kandahar in the second year, which will add an additional 10% of the poppy producing population to the initiative.⁴⁰ Year three introduces the program to Helmand province, which alone accounts for 65% of Afghanistan's poppy.⁴¹

In order to succeed, the Afghan government must administer the PCRCP. Although international donations will fund the program, an Afghan face must run the program in order to build credibility for the government. History has shown that the population of Afghanistan does not support foreign governments attempting to run and administer the country. The British and the former Soviet Union attempted in the past to occupy and run Afghanistan, and in both cases, the Afghan people eventually forced out the foreign governments.⁴² Initiatives working to reduce poppy production have a

greater chance of success if the government of Afghanistan receives the recognition for program implementation.

A third element of success is a requirement for unwavering support from beneficiaries of the program. Farmers must publicly renounce the cultivation of poppy in order to receive any microgrants. The public renouncement will serve two purposes. First, it places the burden of scrutiny onto the recipients of the program. The program beneficiaries must understand that to receive the microgrants, verification of compliance will occur. The second reason for the public pronouncement is that publicly renouncing poppy growing creates implied support of the government. In the poppy growing provinces of interest, the government needs to take advantage of any opportunity to highlight any support program that counters Taliban or insurgent influence.

A key to success for the PCRCP is ensuring all players in the drug trade are part of the program. The farmers will receive the microgrant distributions, but the program cannot neglect the traffickers. In order to reduce any potential disruptive influence, the PCRCP will hire traffickers to monitor and administer the program. Turning former traffickers to supporting the Afghan government has the potential for success when looking at the success of the “Sons of Iraq” programs.

Generally, traffickers are in the drug business for money. If a suitable monetary substitution continues to bring in revenue, then an opportunity exists to turn these key traffickers to a different path. In the case of the PCRCP, the Afghan government will reach out to many of the traffickers and enlist their support to help manage and supervise the program. Unfortunately, the government of Afghanistan has corruption problems. Many Afghan government officials, to include allegedly President Hamid

Karzai's brother, participate in the drug trade.⁴³ What better way to turn these officials away from the drug business than by paying them to help manage a program designed to eliminate the poppy cultivation business?

To prevent the PCRCP program from falling into neglect, recipients must reaffirm their renouncement pledge each planting season prior to receiving any further microgrant funds. If the program administrators do not require renouncement pledges followed by continued verification, then farmers will attempt to simultaneously receive microgrant funds and return to poppy cultivation.

Supporting the renouncement and verification aspects of the PCRCP requires the enforcement of penalties against violators. In 2002 and 2003, the United Kingdom attempted to pay farmers not to plant poppy. However, the farmers pocketed funds and still produced opium because no penalties existed.⁴⁴ Instead, the recipients of the program received money and continued to grow poppy. The administrators of the program must be able to impose penalties within the rule of law.

Determining appropriate penalties is critical to the success of the program. Penalties involving a range of potential punishments will confuse many farmers who are often illiterate or unfamiliar with many aspects of a judicial system. Additionally, penalties sending farmers to prison will not help build the image of the Afghan government as a supportive institution. Instead, the penalties should be easy to understand and based on a "quid pro quo" system. If farmers who receive a PCRCP microgrant continue to grow poppy then the crop will receive immediate priority for eradication. If the traffickers hired to help administer the PCRCP continue to support the drug business then they will lose their positions of authority and receive a jail sentence

lasting through the current poppy season. These simple penalties will help bolster support for the PCRP because of the potential lost income incurred from violating the conditions of the program.

The program requires international support to survive. The government of Afghanistan simply does not have the money to fund the microgrants. In order to entice international donors, the program must have a life cycle and end date. The PCRP cannot be an enduring program. If an end date does not exist, farmers and other program recipients may potentially begin to view the program as a form of welfare. Five years is an adequate time for alternative livelihood initiatives to reach fruition. The entire program will last seven years with the first three years accounting for the phased in approach. In the same manner, the last three years will phase out benefits of the program with the five provinces targeted seeing their benefits end in year six and only Helmand receiving benefits in year seven. Limiting the program to a specific time period will help ensure that the government of Afghanistan keeps the program a priority and will prevent donor fatigue.

Cost of Program

As the saying goes, “there is no such thing as a free lunch,” and the PCRP is no exception. Implementing the program requires significant funding, but the overall benefits outweigh the costs. Estimating the size of the program budget requires addressing four cost factors: (1) identifying how many people will be part of the program, (2) the size of the microgrants, (3) the cost to gain support from the key traffickers, and (4) administrative costs.

To estimate costs requires understanding how many people will be part of the program. Because of large and extended families, it is difficult to determine exactly how many individuals participate in the poppy cultivation business. Therefore, the PCRCP will focus its microgrant incentives towards families instead of individuals. In the 2008 Afghanistan Opium Survey, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime estimated that approximately 366,000 families from the seven PCRCP targeted provinces were involved in the poppy cultivation business with Helmand province accounting for 66% (or approximately 242,000) of the families. The total family population breakdown by province is as follows in Table 1:

<u>Province</u>	<u>Approximate Number of Families Involved in Poppy Cultivation</u>	<u>% of Families from 7 PCRCP Targeted Provinces</u>
Helmand	242,000	66%
Farah	37,000	10%
Kandahar	33,000	9%
Uruzgan	22,000	6%
Nimruz	15,000	4%
Zabul	10,000	3%
Day Kundi	7,000	2%

Table 1. Families Involved in Poppy Cultivation from PCRCP Targeted Provinces⁴⁵

The next step in cost determination is identifying the size of the microgrants families will receive. For the program to be an effective renouncement incentive requires the microgrants to replace what the families receive for growing poppies. In 2008, the farmers received on average \$70 for every kilogram of opium produced which worked out to approximately \$1965 per family.⁴⁶ An estimate is that each family microgrant will average approximately \$2000. Of course, individual family microgrants will vary based on the amount of land used for poppy cultivation.

Determining trafficker costs is a completely subjective endeavor but critically important to ensure program success. The farmers are but one target of the program. Gaining support from the key traffickers is another required element of the program. If the key traffickers involved in the drug business do not receive some amount of replacement income for revenue lost from the opium business, then pressure will remain on farmers to continue growing poppy and the Afghan government is sure to receive resistance to the PCRCP. Matching the money obligated for microgrants and using the additional money to pay traffickers to help operate the program and supervise program compliance will provide the needed incentive for the traffickers to support the Afghan government counternarcotics efforts.

Estimating PCRCP administrative costs is also subjective in nature but looking at administrative costs of American charities provides a starting point. In order to educate and entice potential contributors, most charities report administrative costs. In 2008, Charity Navigator, a web-based charity evaluator, reported that on average American charities spent almost 10% of provided funding on administrative costs.⁴⁷

Conservative approximations have to assume PCRCP administrative costs will be significantly higher than U.S. charities. Government corruption, lack of technological advances, and the required large geographic scope of the PCRCP are just three factors increasing the administrative costs of the program. Subjectively looking at the various cost factors leads to estimating administrative costs will equal 25% of the total microgrant and trafficker payment costs.

The next step after completing the cost factor analysis is to develop the program budget. The program gradually phases in over a three-year period. The first year only

focuses on the five least violent poppy producing provinces (Farah, Uruzgan, Nimruz, Zabul, and Day-Kundi). The cost for the first year, to include microgrant costs and matching support costs, is \$455 million. Year two incorporates Kandahar, which increases the costs to \$620 million, and year three includes the addition of Helmand for an annual cost of \$1.83 billion. Years four and five will include all seven provinces with no change in cost. In year six, the program starts to wind down as the initial five targeted provinces no longer receive program benefits and the cost will drop to \$1.665 billion. In year seven of the program, the last year of the program, Kandahar will cease receiving money and only Helmand will receive benefits at a cost of \$1.21 billion. The total cost of the program for the seven years is approximately \$9.44 billion. Table 2 shows a year-by-year breakdown of the PCRCP budget:

Year	# of Families	Microgrant Costs	Trafficker Costs	Administrative Costs	Total Annual Budget
1	91,000	\$182 million	\$182 million	\$91 million	\$455 million
2	124,000	\$248 million	\$248 million	\$124 million	\$620 million
3	366,000	\$732 million	\$732 million	\$366 million	\$1.83 billion
4	366,000	\$732 million	\$732 million	\$366 million	\$1.83 billion
5	366,000	\$732 million	\$732 million	\$366 million	\$1.83 billion
6	333,000	\$666 million	\$666 million	\$333 million	\$1.665 billion
7	242,000	\$484 million	\$484 million	\$242 million	\$1.21 billion
Total		\$3.776 billion	\$3.776 billion	\$1.888 billion	\$9.44 billion

Table 2. Annual Budgets of PCRCP

Program Justification

No program can guarantee success but several specific factors support the assertion that the PCRCP can thrive. The most important factor supporting success is that the PCRCP does not require a new counternarcotics strategy. In fact, by its design the PCRCP only bolsters and does not replace any aspect of the current strategy. As seen in 2008, the current strategy is showing limited success.⁴⁸ However, in those

provinces with significant instability and a large Taliban influence, no incentive exists to encourage farmers to support the Afghan government instead of the Taliban. The PCRP will provide such an incentive and therefore provide an option for farmers to consider.

A second factor supporting success is that with poppy cultivation mainly confined to seven provinces, the PCRP can narrow its scope to only the poppy players in provinces of interest. Any program attempting to reach all potential poppy growers in the country would fail because of the sheer size and scope required to administer and oversee the program. Initially focusing the program on just two provinces and then expanding in future years will provide the Afghan government the time to develop and establish the procedures and bureaucracies required to make the full program a success.

A third factor supporting success is the limited duration of the program. Limiting the program to a specific time period will prevent the development of a dependency attitude within the minds of the recipients. Additionally, since the PCRP owes its existence to donors, an end date will more likely garner approval from the international community. The end date will also help the Afghan government and its international partners to remain focused on the simultaneous success of alternative livelihood initiatives.

Although there is not a magic formula to determine if the PCRP will succeed in Afghanistan, recent history in Iraq involving another type of “buy-out” program indicates success is possible. In 2006 as the Iraqi “surge” was quickly becoming the major news of the day, several other initiatives also were receiving credit for helping to reduce the violence in Iraq. One specific initiative was the “Sons of Iraq” or “Iraq Awakening”

movement. U.S. military commanders hired and paid former insurgent Sunni men to protect towns and key infrastructure facilities from attacks from other insurgent groups to include Al Qaeda.⁴⁹ The fact that at one time these former insurgents were fighting Americans did not dissuade our military leaders from reaching out to them. The intent was to pay the men to fight for the coalition and Iraqi people as opposed to having another entity pay them to fight against the coalition. The program, at least over the last two years, appears to have seen success. Violence is down significantly in the Sunni dominated areas targeted by the “Sons of Iraq” program.⁵⁰

Since the Sons of Iraq program was successful then logic suggests the PCRCP can also succeed. If farmers receive money not to cultivate poppy, it makes sense when looking through the lens of the “Sons of Iraq” program that the PCRCP has a legitimate chance for success.

Program Challenges

No new program arrives on the scene without encountering challenges and the PCRCP is no exception. Four challenges facing the PCRCP include: (1) addressing the limited number of potential beneficiaries, (2) obtaining funding for the program, (3) ensuring program recipients adhere to the program requirements, and (4) persuading the United States government to support a drug cultivation “buy-out” program.

The first challenge to the program is that not every farmer in Afghanistan will receive benefits of the program, but by design, the program does not target all farmers. The PCRCP only targets populations in the seven main poppy producing provinces. Farmers in the non-poppy growing provinces do not qualify for the program. So the

question facing the administrators of the PCRCP is how to prevent the development of a rift between the “haves and have nots”.

Since the PCRCP is only part of the total counternarcotics strategy and not a separate campaign, the government of Afghanistan can prevent any rift development through continued aggressive application of the non-PCRCP aspects of the counternarcotics strategy. Specifically, development in other provinces must continue in those areas with already reduced or eliminated poppy cultivation. Rewarding continued good behavior in non-poppy growing areas is essential to the success of the overall counternarcotics strategy. If such development does not continue, then the current non-poppy growing provinces will potentially return to poppy harvesting in an attempt to reap PCRCP benefits.

A way to reward continued good behavior is to direct other agricultural support programs towards those provinces not targeted by the PCRCP. One particular program that will help reduce the “left out” feeling that some farmers may feel is a current National Guard program sending agricultural experts directly to the farmers.⁵¹ The National Guard program has been successful in certain parts of the country and will provide a very beneficial complementary effort to the PCRCP.

The PCRCP has a high estimated price tag when compared to the amount of money previously spent on Afghan counternarcotics initiatives. The United States could fund the entire program but enlisting support from European nations requires consideration. Currently a significant percentage of the opium produced in Afghanistan finds its way into Europe. A recent Interpol report stated that Europe is the “primary market for heroin, accounting for one-third of the world’s opiate consumption.”⁵²

Therefore, Europe has an interest in any counternarcotics initiative with potential for reducing the amount of drugs flowing into the continent.

An advantage of the PCRCP is that the program does not require military personnel, improving the possibility of financial support from Europe. The issue of troop numbers has led to friction at times between European nations and the U.S. government.⁵³ However, there is no question European nations support the Afghanistan mission, they just view the role of their forces differently than the United States would prefer. European nations might very well prefer to provide financial backing to the PCRCP if such funding helped to curtail drug flow into the European continent while simultaneously showing support for operations in Afghanistan.

A third challenge is establishing and enforcing accountability control measures to ensure the recipients of the program do not take the money and then continue to support the opium business. This particular challenge is a critical determinant of the program's success. Since corruption is rife in the current Afghan government, preventing the PCRCP from becoming just another abused program is difficult but not impossible. All players involved in implementing and monitoring the program must remain firm in their resolve to guarantee recipients adhere to the requirements of the program. The traffickers hired to help monitor the program must also receive close monitoring in order to ensure program compliance. Successfully meeting this accountability challenge will significantly strengthen the confidence and acceptance of the government of Afghanistan.

The key to limiting corruption in the PCRCP is to institute a series of checks and balances in the process so no one player retains too much control. Additionally,

implementation of the PCRP must remain transparent and open to scrutiny and criticism. If the recipients of the program do not maintain program requirements then violators must suffer penalties to include eradication without compensation or jail.

The fourth and potentially most difficult challenge is persuading the U.S. government to accept what is essentially a “buy-off” program targeted at drug growers. The current National Drug Control Strategy provides a rationale that could help garner U.S. government support for the PCRP. The National Drug Control Strategy works to reduce drug use in America through a balanced approach of stopping drug use before it starts, healing America’s drug users, and disrupting the market for illegal drugs.⁵⁴ Focusing on the goal of disrupting the market for illegal drugs provides a potential avenue leading to U.S. acceptance of the PCRP.

The approach taken by the National Drug Control Strategy to disrupt the illegal drugs market is to attack “pressure points” in the drug trade.⁵⁵ These pressure points include targeting traffickers and users alike at the various points in the drug supply chain where the key players make decisions regarding production or movement that affect profit margins. The intent of the PCRP is to provide a temporary profit alternative for all the key players in the drug business. Paying both farmers and key non-farmer drug players not to participate in the drug business will break the profit margin pressure point and provide time for other livelihood initiatives to develop. Such a program would be in concert with the national drug control strategy, which could mean U.S. government endorsement of the PCRP.

Conclusion

No easy solution exists to the Afghan drug problem. Due to the simultaneous implementation of eradication efforts and alternative livelihood initiatives, no time exists for alternative livelihood initiatives to develop and become viable. The current Afghanistan counternarcotics strategy also ignores the need to provide some type of inducement to convince key non-farming drug players to leave the drug business and begin to support the government of Afghanistan.

A program building a time buffer between poppy eradication and alternative livelihood development will significantly enhance the current counternarcotics strategy. The Poppy Cultivation Renouncement Program will provide the needed time buffer by targeting poppy growing farmers with microgrants to replace poppy revenue thus creating the opportunity for alternative livelihood initiatives to develop. Targeting key traffickers by enlisting their support in administering the program has the potential for success when compared to the accomplishments of the “Sons of Iraq” program. With proper supervision and oversight, the Poppy Cultivation Renouncement Program can help Afghanistan break free of its pervasive opium challenge.

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